Leicestershire County Council

Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report **2025/2026**



Complaints & Information
Corporate Resources Dept

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Purpose of Report

To report to Members and Officers on Leicestershire County Council's (LCC) Children's Social Care complaints activity from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

To meet the requirements of Regulation 18(2) of Statutory Instrument 2006 No. 1681 Local Authority Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006 and Regulation 13(3) of Statutory Instrument 2006 No. 1738 The Children Act (1989) Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.

For the current year the following Statutory guidance remains relevant:

- Getting the best from Complaints 2006
- the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Practitioner Guidance which should be referenced alongside the existing statutory guidance

This annual report provides analysis and commentary for Children and Family Services on all complaints managed under the statutory process. Those complainants who do not qualify to use the statutory process are considered under the County Council's Corporate Complaint Procedure and reported in the Corporate Annual Report presented to the Scrutiny Commission.

The Complaints Manager role is responsible for ensuring that complaints are handled appropriately and providing support to the department in resolving complex cases. In addition, the Complaints Manager will highlight key trends that emerge each year and any recommendations that would improve how we work. The Children and Family Services department retain responsibility for actioning any such improvements.

Introduction

This report only considers complaints identified as statutory complaints as defined by the Statutory Guidance outlined within "Getting the Best from Complaints".

There are two key tests applied in making the above assessment:

1) Is the complainant eligible?
2) Is the subject matter within scope of the procedure?

Concerns that fall outside of the scope of the statutory complaints' procedure are responded to by the Complaints and Information team and are then handled in line with the relevant alternative route which typically includes:

- Consideration as a corporate complaint
- Referral to the Leicestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Board (LSCB) appeals procedure
- Explanation that the matter cannot be considered as the subject matter has / will be adjudicated in Court

Complaints Volumes (Cases Received 2025-2026)

Statutory Children's Social Care Complaint and LGO Cases

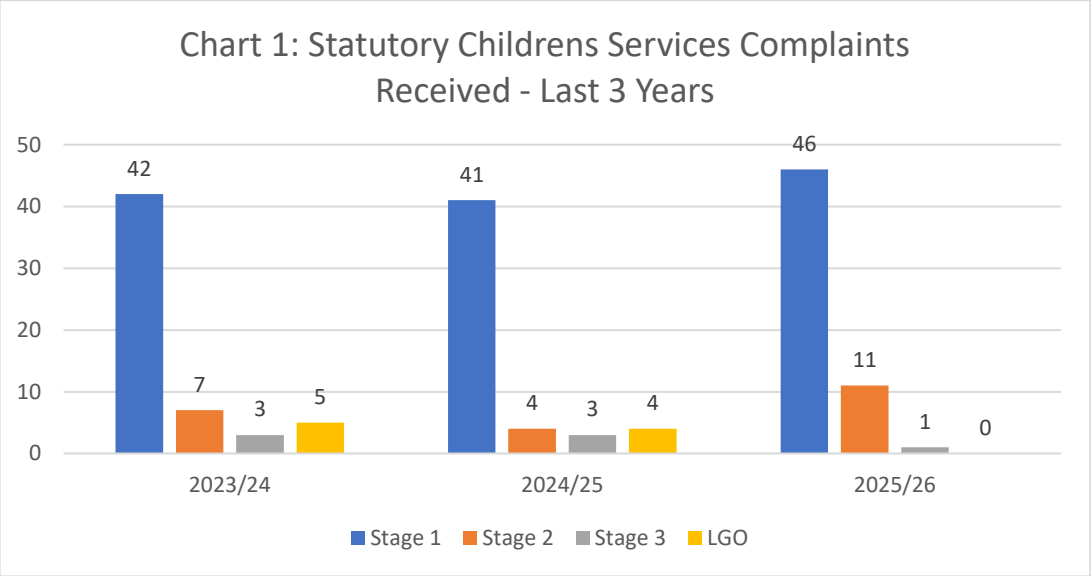


Chart 1 shows a total of 58 cases (the total of stage 1, 2 and 3 cases) were accepted under the statutory procedure in 25/26. This is an increase of 10 from the previous year (48).

Stage 1

46 cases were accepted under Stage 1 of the local policy – Local Resolution. This is an increase of 5 from the previous year (41).

Stage 2

11 cases escalated to Stage 2 of the local policy - Independent Investigation. This is a large increase of 7 from the previous year (4) and represents 24% (rounded) of the Stage 1 cases, an increase from 24/25 (10%).

Stage 3

Stage 3 Panels cannot re-investigate complaints and as such can only look at the quality and comprehensiveness of the Independent Report at Stage 2.

1 Stage 3 Review Panel was convened in 25/26; this figure is lower than the previous year even though stage 1 complaints were higher.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

The LGSCO takes a rigid approach on consideration of early referrals. The implications are that it is more important than ever to be clear at the outset which complaints procedure should be used. Once the statutory procedure has been initiated, the LGSCO expects all stages to be completed.

This has implications for the department and highlights the need to ensure every effort is made to resolve complaints at Stage 1 of the process.

The Council received 0 ombudsman cases, in respect of statutory children's complaints, in 25/26. This shows the work being carried out at stage 1, 2 and 3 are beneficial and suitable remedies are being achieved.

Corporate Complaint Cases

The Council follows guidance issued by the LGSCO in assessing eligibility to the statutory procedure and this sees most complaints that are **not** focused on the impact on a child handled under our Corporate Complaints Procedure. This helps control costs incurred should complaints escalate.

To give the full picture of complaints, Table 1 sets out all social care related complaints for the last 2 reporting periods.

Table 1: table showing counts of social care complaints received and managed under the Children's Social Care Complaints Policy or Corporate Complaints Procedure.

Reporting Year	Statutory Complaints	Corporate Complaints	Total
2023-24	52	129	**181**
2024-25	48	168	**216**
2025-26	58	183	**241**

Table 1 shows, there has been a 19% increase in the total number of complaints about Children's Social Care.

When examining these complaint volumes, it is important to consider the broader operational context; specifically, the total demand handled by Children's Social Care throughout the year. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the primary case categories, illustrating not only the type but also the escalating volume of demand placed on the service in 3 of the 4 areas listed.

Table 2: cases dealt with by Children's Social Care in each reporting period.

Social Care Demand	2024/25	2025/26	% Change
Referrals to Children's Social Care	6797	7477	+10
Single Assessments	6530	6737	+3.2
Children in Care at 31 March	694	765	-10.2
Child Protection Plans at 31 March	506	669	+32.2

Analysing complaints alongside these figures helps to contextualise the proportionality of concerns raised: while the total number of complaints has grown, so too has the overall caseload, suggesting that the rise in complaints may partly mirror the service's expanding remit and the complexities of the cases managed.

When viewed in the context of increased referral activity, the proportion of referrals versus complaints has reduced from 0.7% in 2024/25 to 0.6% in 2025/26. While complaint volumes increased, they did not rise at the same rate as referral demand suggesting a slight improvement in the relative level of dissatisfaction expressed through the complaints process.

Statutory Complaints Received by Service Areas

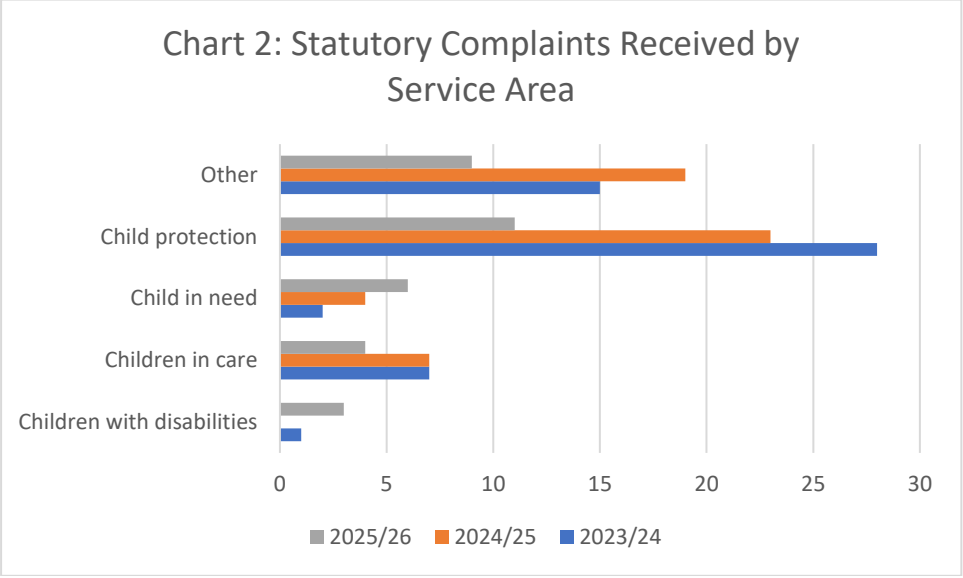


Chart 2 shows the top four services with the highest counts for 25/26 and the comparisons for those services for 24/25 and 23/24. For ease of visualisation, the remaining services have been grouped under other. Child Protection consistently presents with the most cases across

the reporting years shown and both Children in Care and Children with Disabilities has seen a decrease.

Compliments Received 2025-2026

During 2025-26 there were 20 compliments recorded regarding Children's Social Care officers. This is an increase on last year (6). The Complaints Team can only record compliments which are received directly via our online compliments form or shared when received directly into the service. As many compliments are received directly by the service, the above data may not be truly reflective of the overall amount received.

A sample of departmental comments can be found at Appendix A and provide an important balance when reviewing the performance of the department.

Complaints Performance

The key performance indicators for speed of response, outcomes, causes and identified learning are linked to complaints that have been decided.

This is important as it ensures that full data sets can be presented, both to departments on a quarterly basis, and at year end. It also avoids the scenario whereby Ombudsman findings of maladministration might not appear in annual reports.

It follows from the above that the figures presented below will not match the data presented in section two of this report which focused on complaints *received*.

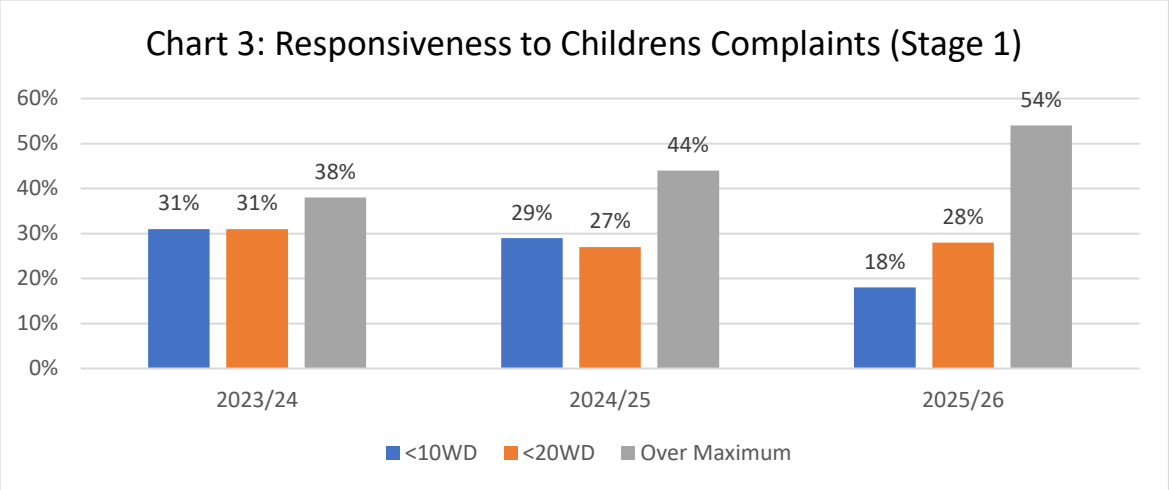
Responsiveness to Statutory Complaints

Stage 1

In respect of 'Stage 1 Local Resolution', the Council aims to provide a response to the complainant within 10 working days in accordance with Regulation 14 'the local authority must consider and try to resolve the representations as soon as is reasonably practicable and in any event within 10 working days of the start date as defined in paragraphs (3) and (4).' Complex cases may take longer to consider and 'The local authority may extend the period for considering representations under this regulation by a maximum of 10 working days where they consider the representations to be complex.', giving a maximum of 20 working days.

It is important to note that, where complainants have not agreed an extension and there is no good reason for a complaint to exceed 20 working days, the Complaint and Information Services Manager is duty bound to offer a Stage 2 investigation.

The Complaints Manager has not had to exercise this duty during the year.



Analysis of the Stage 1 response times shows the percentages of cases per time category has decreased with 46% (25/26) of cases being responded to within 20 W/D, compared to 56% in the previous year. There were 46 complaints in 2025/26, 5 more complaints this year than in 2024/25 (41) and with the use of AI being used to write complaints, they are becoming more complex and can take longer to respond to which reflects in Chart 3.

Cases over the maximum period highlights the importance of ongoing monitoring of case complexity and resource allocation to ensure that timely resolutions remain the norm, and to prevent delays that might negatively impact complainant satisfaction and overall trust in the process

Stage 2

Regulation 17 states the 'local authority should send notice of their response to the complainant and, where one has been appointed, to his advocate within 25 working days of the start dates as defined in paragraphs (4) and (5).' Where it is not possible to respond within 25 working days, cases may be extended 'no later than 65 working days from the start date, by which they will have concluded their consideration and sent notice of their response.'.

Table 3: table showing the count of Stage 2 cases which met the response time categories

Time to Respond	24/25	25/26
Within 25 working days	1	4
Within 65 working days	2	3
Over maximum	1	6

The proportion of cases responded to within the maximum statutory guideline of 65 working days has decreased from the previous year, with 7 of the 13 investigations closed achieving this. This is down to the large increase of stage 2 complaints in 2025/26, the complexity of the stage 2 requests received and the delays out of our control such as, holding interviews with relevant people/staff and service users' availability.

The ombudsman has indicated that providing a local authority is managing the expectations of a complainant and not unduly delaying resolution, there is unlikely to be severe criticism of not meeting this timescale.

Stage 3

Regulation 18 states 'Where a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigations of his representations under regulation 17 the complainant or, where one has been appointed, his advocate may request that the representations be further considered by a panel in accordance with regulation 19.'. The complainant should make their request within 20 working dates of the date on which the complainant received the notice of the local authority's response. The local authority has up to 50 working days in which to issue its response.

There was 1 request to escalate to Stage 3 during the year, which progressed to a panel hearing and was managed within the statutory timescale.

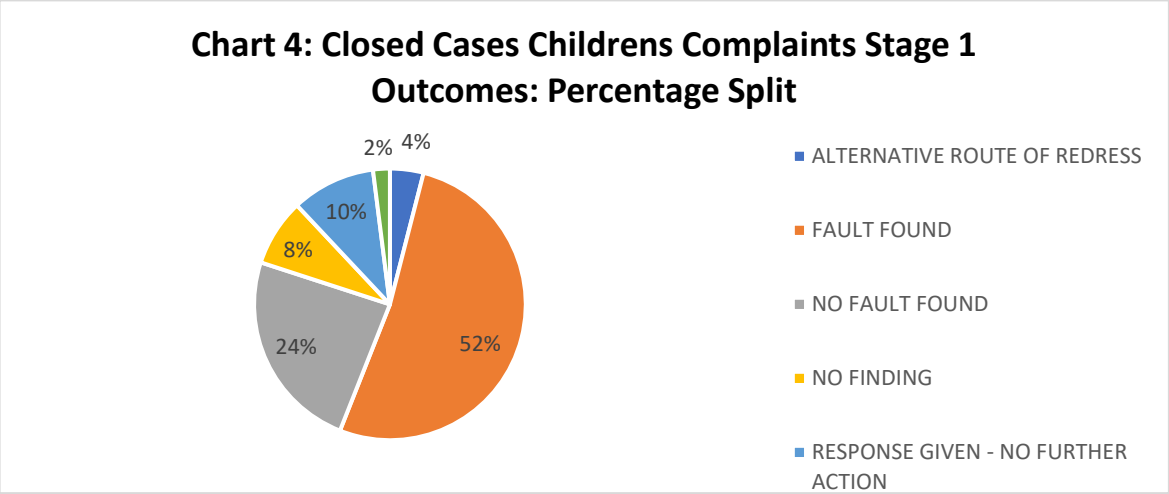
Complaint Causes

To try to understand the main causes leading to complaints, the complaints team assess the underlying causes for each complaint determined.

The biggest single cause during 2025-26 was around poor level of service or service failure (12) which also interlinked with accuracy of records.

Most complaints continue to be made by parents or family members (where they have sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare[1]).

Complaint Outcomes



[1] Guidance set out in section 2.6 of Getting the Best from Complaints.

Chart 4 above shows that Stage 1 Children's Services complaint outcomes shows that 52% (26 cases) of complaints were upheld (compared to 42%(58 cases) in 24/25), with fault found, making this the largest outcome category. This indicates that just over half of complaints investigated resulted in some level of service failure or maladministration being identified and provides valuable opportunities for learning and service improvement.

24% (12 cases) of complaints resulted in no fault being found, demonstrating that in almost a quarter of cases the investigation concluded that services had acted appropriately and in accordance with relevant policies and procedures.

10% (5 cases) of complaints received a response with no further action required, while 8% resulted in no finding, reflecting cases where a definitive conclusion could not be reached or where the issues raised did not lend themselves to a formal finding.

Overall, the outcomes demonstrate that whilst a significant proportion of complaints were upheld, almost half of cases either found no fault, required no further action, were withdrawn, or were resolved through alternative means. The findings reinforce the importance of complaints as a mechanism for identifying service improvements while also providing assurance where investigations determine that practice and decision-making were appropriate.

Who Complains?

In 2025/26, two complaints were made by children or young people[2]. This is lower than 2024/25 (4%) and represents 2% of the overall volume. The remaining complaints were made by parents or others who were deemed to have sufficient interest in the child's well-being.

It is not unusual for numbers of complaints made by young persons to be proportionally low and this mirrors the situation reported by regional colleagues.

It remains a key priority of the Complaints Manager to ensure that everything is being done to improve accessibility of the complaints process to our children and young people and there continue to be good links between the Children's Rights Officers and Complaints. Regular discussions are held to ensure and check that appropriate processes are followed to resolve issues.

Financial Implications

Children's Service Complaints expenditure

Both Stages 2 and 3 of the require independent investigation to take place.

At Stage 2, the authority is required to appoint an Investigative Officer who must not work in the same area as the complaint being investigated and be suitably trained to carry out investigative work.

In addition to the Investigative Officer, the Regulations also require an Independent Person to be appointed to ensure the investigation is carried out fairly. This is a mandatory requirement, and this person cannot work for the Council.

At Stage 3, the procedure is for a panel hearing to be held to review the Stage 2 investigation. This involves the appointment of 3 external panel members.

Leicestershire County Council can also explore independent mediation as an alternative form of redress through Stages 2 or 3. Mediation has not been used this year for any cases.

Finally, on some occasions, financial redress is offered as part of the complaints process. Usually this is by way of a Local Settlement with the Ombudsman but can also be recommended at either Stage 2 or 3 of the procedure.

Costs continue to be controlled through several ways including:

- Complaints Team proactively looking for opportunities to resolve via meetings if any prospect of success.
- Ensuring that complainants are eligible to use the statutory complaints procedure.
- Imposition of restrictions to the scope of some independent investigations. Typically, around matters that have been determined in the Court arena.
- Recruitment of a casual pool of Independent Investigators. This both saves money but is helping ensure consistency of work.

Learning from Complaints

Complaints are a valuable source of information which can help to identify recurring or underlying problems and potential improvements. We know that numbers alone do not tell everything about the attitude towards complaints and how they are responded to locally. Arguably of more importance is to understand the impact those complaints have on people and to learn the lessons from complaints to improve the experience for others.

Lessons can usually be learned from complaints that were upheld and, in some instances, where no fault was found and where the Council identifies that improvements to services can be made.

Occasionally during an investigation issues will be identified that need to be addressed over and above the original complaint. The Complaints Team will always try to look at the “bigger picture” to ensure that residents receive the best possible service from the Council.

Corrective Action

All the 26 complaints where fault has been found have been reviewed by the Complaints Team to ascertain what action the relevant department has taken, both in remedying the fault, and any wider learning to avoid such issues occurring in the future.

Remedial action typically consists of both individual redress (e.g., apology, carrying out overdue work) and wider actions that may affect many.

The most common action taken was staff training. There are lots of good examples of this taking place both at individual and team level. These included:

- reminding teams of the need to record rationale for decisions made
- reminder to keep accurate accounts of records
- reminder on need to cross-check information provided in referrals from partner agencies
- reminder to escalate cases where there are concerns with a lack of action from other agencies involved
- Commitment to develop training on trauma informed approach

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Performance

Each year, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) publishes a set of data that reflects its complaint-handling activity across England. This includes both national and local authority-level insights. The information contained in this section has been extracted from the LGSCO's data set.

Enquiries

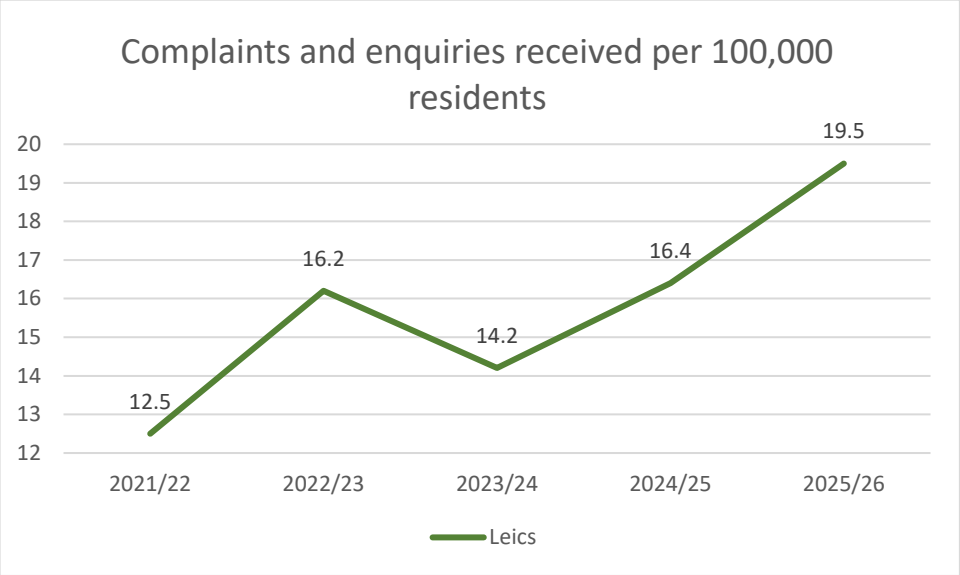


Chart 5: volume and percentage share by area

Case Category	2023/24		2024/25		2025/26	
Education and Children's Services	67	64%	73	60%	83	57%
Adult Social Care	26	25%	30	25%	36	25%
Highways and Transport	8	8%	14	11%	16	11%
Corporate and Other Services	-	-	2	2%	10	7%
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	2	2%	1	1%	1	1%
Housing	1	1%	-	-		
Planning and Development	-	-	1	1%		
Other	-	-	1	1%		

Chart 5 shows that Ombudsman complaints and enquiries continue to be concentrated in three categories. Education and Children's Services remain the largest category, increasing from 67 cases in 2023/24 to 83 in 2025/26. However, its share of total cases has reduced from 64% to 57%

Decisions

In respect of decisions made against cases categorised as Education & Children Services (63 cases of which 35 were SEN related), the LGSCO made the following decisions:

- 27 Referred back for local resolution
- 17 Upheld compared to 33 in 2024/25
- 16 Closed after initial enquiries
- 1 Incomplete/Invalid

- 1 Advice Given
- 2 Not upheld

Monitoring the Process

The Complaints team continues to support Children's Services to manage and learn from complaints. The key services offered to the department are:

1. Complaints advice and support
2. Commissioning and administrative support for all Independent Investigations
3. Production of Performance Reports
4. Liaison with Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
5. Quality assurance of complaint responses
6. Complaint handling training for operational managers

Assistance continues to be routinely provided to Heads of Service in drafting adjudication responses to Stage 2 investigations. This helps ensure a consistency of response and that clear action plans are created.

Work has also started to help improve oversight and tracking of actions agreed within Stage 1 responses which was identified as a weakness during the year.

Appendix A – Compliments Received

- Thank you to the admissions & appeals team we were very happy and grateful with the support and communication throughout the whole process and wanted to thank you all
- We felt incredibly well supported throughout the whole adoption transition time over these last 3 weeks and would like to reiterate our thanks to all involved, particularly Isabelle Coad's support.
- Thank you to Rebecca Allen and Isabelle Hockenhull for all your help over the last few months. Isabelle has been such a great help to us through a very difficult period. We are so grateful to both of you and won't forget it.
- Jessie, again thank you so much for all your help and support it was lovely talking to you yesterday, thank you.
- Thank you so much Claire Nicholls for all you have done for us and for your help and support. The learning has been invaluable. We both feel so much more able to cope with the challenges of raising a child affected by early life trauma.
- Sally was a breath of fresh air with the four weekly sessions we had with her. Her strategies, support, friendliness have had a huge impact on our family life. She is a credit to her role within the Family Help service.
- I just wanted to take a moment to say a heartfelt thank you to Tafadzwa for everything you have done for me and my children. Your support and guidance have been absolutely incredible.
- Thank you to the SENA team, my daughter started Leicester High School for Girls and has done very well. I wanted to share my gratitude in the support and faith Maya has received to help her fulfill her true potential despite her challenges.

Appendix B – Upheld Cases

Of the 17 Upheld cases, 14 were recorded as 'fault and injustice' and a summary of the cases is provided below.

Case 1 Special educational needs 19-May-2025

We cannot investigate Mrs X's complaint the Council failed to seek advice and information from an Educational Psychologist (EP) as part of its Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment of her child Y because it is connected to her appeal to the Tribunal. The Council was at fault for not issuing Y's plan within the statutory timescales. The Council has agreed to apologise and make a payment to Mrs X to acknowledge the uncertainty and delayed appeal rights this caused.

Case 2 Special educational needs 29-May-2025

We found the Council at fault for failing to properly consider its duty to provide alternative education for Mrs X's child, Y, or document its decision-making. However, we cannot say the Council's decision would have been different, but for these faults. The Council agreed to apologise and pay a symbolic financial remedy in recognition of the avoidable uncertainty this caused. It also agreed to provide guidance to its officers.

Case 3 Alternative provision 03-Jul-2025

Mrs X complained the Council failed to provide education for her child for over three years. Mrs X also complained the Council failed to review or update her child's Education, Health and Care Plan. We found fault with the Council failing to provide suitable education for Mrs X's child from 22 May 2023 to 28 August 2024. We also found fault with the Council delaying by 17 months outside the statutory timescales in reviewing Mrs X's child's Education, Health and Care Plan. The Council has also accepted it failed to provide provision to Mrs X's child from their Education, Health and Care Plan or provide suitable education from 3 September 2024 to 30 May 2025. We have detailed the actions the Council has agreed to take to address the injustice its fault caused in paragraph 86 of this decision statement.

Case 4 Special educational needs 22-Jul-2025

The Council was at fault in how it reviewed and amended Mrs X's child W's Education, Health and Care Plan. It was also at fault for delay securing the provision in that Plan and for poor complaints handling. This caused Mrs X frustration and meant she had to go to undue time and trouble pursuing her complaint. It also meant W missed out on provision they should have had. To remedy their injustice, the Council will apologise to Mrs X, pay her £1100 and confirm the name of the member of staff who will act as her single point of contact in future.

Case 5 Special educational needs 20-Aug-2025

Mrs X complained that the Council delayed issuing an Education, Health and Care Plan after a needs assessment. There was 6 months delay by the Council, which was fault. A payment remedies the injustice to Mrs X. There was also delay in providing Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy provision, which could have been provided separately to the school setting which Mrs X disputed at tribunal. An apology and payment remedies the frustration and distress, and loss of provision to Y, the child.

Case 6 School transport 03-Sep-2025

Mrs X complained the Council failed to properly assess her child's transport needs, did not communicate effectively and caused delays in arranging suitable transport. We find the Council at fault for failing to reflect key information from the application in its risk assessment, and for failing to keep Mrs X updated. As a result, unsuitable transport was arranged, and Mrs X incurred avoidable costs to ensure her child could attend education. The Council has agreed to apologise and make a payment to Mrs X.

Case 7 Special educational needs 17-Sep-2025

Mrs Y complained about the way the Council dealt with her child, Z's special educational needs and educational provision following a move to the Council's area. We have found fault causing injustice by the Council in failing to: place Z temporarily at another school; secure their special educational needs provision; and make suitable alternative provision following the transfer of their Education, Health and Care Plan. The Council has agreed to remedy this by: apologising to Mrs Y and Z; making payments to reflect the distress caused and the impact of the missed education on Z; and service improvements.

Case 8 Special educational needs 17-Sep-2025

Mrs Y complained about the way the Council dealt with her child, X's special educational needs and educational provision following a move to its area. We have found fault causing injustice by the Council in failing to: place X temporarily at another school; secure their special educational needs provision; and make suitable alternative provision following the transfer of their Education, Health and Care Plan. The Council has agreed to remedy this by: apologising to Mrs Y and X; and making payments to reflect the distress caused and the impact of the missed education on X.

Case 9 Special educational needs 23-Sep-2025

We will not investigate this complaint about the Education, Health and Care plan process. This is because the Council apologised and offered a suitable remedy and it is unlikely further investigation would achieve anything more for Mr X.

Case 10 Special educational needs 17-Nov-2025

We found fault by the Council on Mrs Y's complaint about its failure to process her request for an Education, Health and Care plan within statutory timescales. It missed the statutory time limit by 39 weeks. It failed to consider whether it was appropriate to fund her daughter's special needs it was aware of when she started home education. It also failed to consider its section 19 duties sooner, advise her and consider education other than at school sooner, or give her information about the consequences of home educating her. The Council agreed to send a written apology, pay £397.06 for the injustice caused by its failures, provide an Action Plan showing how future assessments will be completed within statutory timescales, and will ensure relevant officers consider section 19 duties and education other than at school during assessments where children are out of school. It will ensure it gives parents relevant information and improve communication with them.

Case 11 Alternative provision 27-Nov-2025

Mrs X complained the Council did not provide full time education suitable for her daughter's needs when she could not attend school. We found the Council at fault for not putting in place

provision it agreed her daughter needed, impacting on her educational progress. The Council has agreed to apologise and make a symbolic payment to recognise the injustice caused.

Case 12 Special educational needs 08-Dec-2025

We cannot investigate if the Council was at fault for failing to ensure Miss X's child Y received the special educational provision outlined in their Education, Health and Care Plan, as it was too closely connected to her reason for appealing to the Tribunal. There was fault in the Council's communication and complaint handling for which it has offered a suitable financial remedy during our investigation for the frustration caused. The Council was also at fault for failing to send its decision within four weeks of Y's annual review meeting however this fault did not cause a significant injustice.

Case 13 Special educational needs 23-Dec-2025

We cannot investigate this complaint about the school named in an Education Health and Care Plan, or a failure to provide education. Mr X has appealed to the SEND Tribunal about the matter and therefore the law says we cannot investigate. Nor will we investigate Mr X's further complaint about delays in the annual review process. When considering this complaint, the Council agreed to provide a suitable remedy for Mr X's injustice and there are no wider public interest issues to justify investigating this complaint.

Case 14 School transport 14-Jan-2026

Summary: The Council was at fault for failing to ensure Y's final amended Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan was issued within statutory timescales following the annual review. The Council was also at fault for failing to consider the relevant circumstances of Y's school transport application when deciding to award them a personal travel budget instead of council organised transport. The Council has agreed to apologise and make a payment to remedy the distress, frustration and uncertainty caused.